

NATIONAL YOUTH SPORTS SAFETY FOUNDATION, INC.

FACT SHEET

Emotional Injuries

Desirable Outcomes Of Participation

Ideally, well organized youth sports programs provide a safe, wholesome environment where children can enjoy their spare time and sports experience.

Desirable outcomes of this experience include: having fun; the development of sound character, self esteem, confidence, friendships, trust; and the accomplishment of goals.

Unfortunately, not all children have a positive experience in youth sports programs. Certain behaviors and philosophies have been found to create a destructive environment causing some children to be scarred for life.

Emotional Abuse

Emotions, defined by Richard Lazarous, Professor Emeritus at Cal-Berkeley are as follows: "Negative emotions include: anger, anxiety, fright, sadness, guilt, shame, envy, jealousy, and disgust. Positive emotions we would like developed include: relief, hope, happiness/joy, pride, love, gratitude, and compassion."

Emotional abuse occurs when an individual treats a child in a negative manner which impairs the child's concept of self. This may include a parent/guardian/caregiver, coach, teacher, brother, sister or a friend. Emotional abuse is, perhaps, the most difficult abuse to identify and the most common form of maltreatment in youth sports.

Examples include: rejecting; ignoring; isolating; terrorizing; name calling; making fun of someone; putting someone down, saying things that hurt feelings; and/or yelling.

Additional examples of emotional abuse:

- Forcing a child to participate in sports
- Not speaking to a child after he/she plays poorly in a youth sports game or practice
- Asking your child why he/she played poorly when it meant so much to you
- Hitting a child when his/her play disappoints you
- Yelling at a child for not playing well or for losing
- Punishing a child for not playing well or for losing
- Criticizing and/or ridiculing a child for his/her sports performance

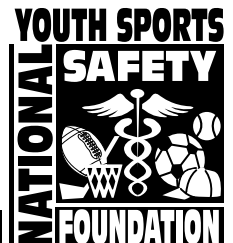
Statements such as: "You're stupid, you're an embarrassment, you're not worth the uniform you play in," are damaging and hurt a young athlete's self esteem and their value as a human being. If said long enough or strong enough these statements or other negative statements may become beliefs of the athlete and may carry forth into their adult life.

Philosophical Abuse

Healthy philosophies foster emotionally healthy children. They are based on sound objectives and nurture the concept that the well-being of a child is more important than his/her performance or winning. The American Sport Education Program suggests, "Athletes First, Winning Second."

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Examples of destructive philosophies:

- Win at all cost philosophy—"winning is the only thing"
- Making a child believe his/her self worth relies on wins and losses. The following illustration demonstrates how this belief is established: the first thing you ask a child when he/she comes home is, "Did you win—what was the score?"

Parental Misconduct At Youth Sports Events

It has been widely reported and well documented that parental rage in youth sports is becoming a commonplace occurrence. Examples of parental misconduct:

- Booing or taunting
- Using profane language or gestures
- Physically hitting another parent, official, or player
- Yelling at or arguing with game officials, parents or players

How Common Is Abuse In Youth Sports?

The Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission conducted a survey in 1993 and found the following incidences of abuse in sports in Minnesota:

- 45.3% of males and females surveyed said they have been called names, yelled at or insulted while participating in sports.
- 17.5% of people surveyed said they have been hit, kicked or slapped while participating in sports.
- 21% said they have been pressured to play with an injury
- 8.2% said they have been pressured to intentionally harm others while playing sports.
- 3.4% said they have been pressured into sex or sexual touching,
- 8% of all surveyed said they have been called names with sexual connotations while participating in sports.

What Are The Effects Of Abuse Or Witnessing Parental Misconduct?

Children who have strong reactions to viewing violence or aggression could develop post traumatic stress disorder.

The trauma associated with witnessing violence can adversely affect a child's ability to learn.

Childhood abuse increases the likelihood that the youth will engage in health risk behaviors including suicidal behavior, and delinquent and aggressive behaviors in adolescence.

Abuse in childhood has been linked to a variety of adverse health outcomes in adulthood. These include mood and anxiety disorders and diseases.

Violence is a learned behavior; our children are often learning violence from places where they should be learning positive life skills.

Abuse will "turn the child off" to exercise and sports participation and prevent the development of healthy lifestyles that will promote wellness through the lifespan.

Barriers To Prevention

People may not be clear what behaviors constitute maltreatment or abuse.

Young athletes may not recognize what's happening to them is abusive.

Resources

- National Youth Sports Safety Foundation, 333 Longwood Avenue, Ste. 202, Boston, MA 02115, 617-277-1171, www.nyssf.org
- Ahead In The Game.Com, www.aheadinthegame.com
- Arizona Sports Summit Accord, www.charactercounts.org/sports/accord.htm
- American Sport Education Program (ASEP), Box 5076, Champaign, IL 61825-5076, 800-747-5698
- Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission, 1700 105th Ave. NE, Blaine, MN 55449, 612-785-5630, www.masc.state.mn.us/resources/index.html
- National Institute for Child Centered Coaching, 3160 Pinebrook Road, Park City, UT 84060, 800-748-4843
- National Alliance for Youth Sports, 2050 Vista Parkway, West Palm Beach, FL 33411, 800-729-2057
- Positive Coaching Alliance, c/o Stanford Athletic Department, Stanford, CA 94305, 650-725-0024, www.positivecoach.org
- Lazarus, RS. (2000) How emotions influence performance in competitive sports. *The Sport Psychologist*, 14,229-252.